

Symposium

'Poldergeist, Contemporary Dutch Architecture'

At Cooper Union, April 11th-12th Friday, and Saturday 10am-6pm

StoreFront for Art & Architecture is pleased to announce an upcoming conference examining the Dutch paradigm vis à vis the American architectural model. The contemporary situation of Dutch architecture, planning and design represents exceptional conditions that contain vital suggestions and thorough responses to the changing landscape of its cities, towns and larger regions. The highly coordinated level of national commitment to these fields, combined with the significant work of a number of critics and practitioners adds up to a nationwide achievement. Ironically, for New Yorkers and the American architectural community, the manifold success of Dutch architecture is linked to the phenomena of a single individual. Rem Koolhaas' recent exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art and his prolific writing have created an international star, who seems to have emerged autonomously. In this symposium, StoreFront for Art & Architecture in collaboration with the Dutch critic Bart Lootsma intends to present the context and challenges that confront Dutch architecture and urbanism today, and will give an international audience an in-depth look at the remarkable achievements in these fields as they compare and contrast to our own situation.

PARTICIPANTS (MODERATORS)

Wiel Arets	Bart Lootsma
Ben van Berckel	Greg Lynn*
Christine Boyer*	Winy Maas
Raai Bunschoten	Arnold Reynndorp
Anne Mie Devolder	Michael Sorkin*
Simone Drost &	Lars Spuybroek
Evelyn Van Veen	Roemer van Toorn
Kristin Feireiss	Ton Venhoeven
Adriaan Geuze	Noud de Vreeze

ISSUES OF THE SYMPOSIUM

PLANNING TRADITION

Holland is experiencing a period of great expansion. This land mass of 42,000 square kilometers has fifteen to sixteen million inhabitants, a population density comparable with that of Japan. Over seventy percent of the built environment dates from after the Second World War, more than in any other country in Western Europe. Even the landscape itself is a new one, including large polders, dams and dikes, are a major portion of the existing agricultural area which has been drastically reorganized and reshaped. The Dutch landscape is completely man made; even 'nature' parks have been designed and planned by the central government. Until recently, social housing and urban extensions have been largely planned and financed by the government as well.

CONGESTION AND CHANGE

Faced with continuous population growth, the state is planning to build between 800,000 and 1,000,000 homes before the year 2005, causing a new awareness of this situation to grow. Bit by bit Holland is becoming congested. That is especially the case with the so-called 'Green Heart' in the middle of the 'Randstad', the ring-shaped metropolis formed by the cities of Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, The Hague, Rotterdam, Gouda and Utrecht. All governmental planning memoranda have agreed on the preserve of this green area; nevertheless, it is under heavy pressure because of the need to build houses.

This problem is occurring at the very moment when the state is in the process of surrendering its traditional supervisory function over planning developments. Under pressure from a growing number of public inquiries, this administrative task is becoming fragmented. In addition, since 1994 social housing has no longer been subsidized. Housing corporations are now obliged to compete on the market unassisted. In this process, the state has deprived itself of some important planning instruments.

Although the Dutch practice is still far removed from the American practice, both systems have come closer to each other, and it will be interesting to discuss possible planning solutions for the new problems Holland is facing. On the other hand, the quality of work produced by the youngest generation of Dutch architects and urbanists is largely due to the changing situation, forcing them to come up with solutions that might be interesting for the Americans as well.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

For a large majority of American design professionals, the Dutch situation is enviable because of the government support and the significant number of building projects. Dutch architecture and urban planning are active and respected, so active in fact that there is sometimes little time to theorize on its directions. The converse is often true of the same fields in America, which are frequently mired in circumstances that leave time for theory but little opportunity for practice. StoreFront for Art & Architecture believes this symposium will invigorate the American audience through the sheer intelligence of the participants' work, as well as form the basis for a critical analysis of this work.

This Symposium is supported by Stimulerings Fond voor Architectuur in Holland.

Recent Event

Making History: 15 Minutes of Fame, Fortune, and Fax Machines
February 4-February 11, 1997

Making History opened to a crowded gathering of design history enthusiasts. The fax performance was organized by The Research Center for Validity Testing and was created as a parody of the history making process in design. Fifteen hundred designers were contacted through an enormous E-mail, fax and regular mail solicitation to participate in this unusual demonstration. Designers were asked to fax their interpretation of their design practice as recorded Fifteen minutes prior to the exhibition's opening.

FUNDING

The general program of StoreFront for Art & Architecture is supported by the Joyce M. Kelly Foundation, The Stephen & Ann Green L. Goldberg Foundation, Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in Visual Arts, Greenwall Foundation, Jerome Foundation, Joe & Emily Lowe Foundation, Reed Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, the New York City Dept. of Cultural Affairs and Friends.

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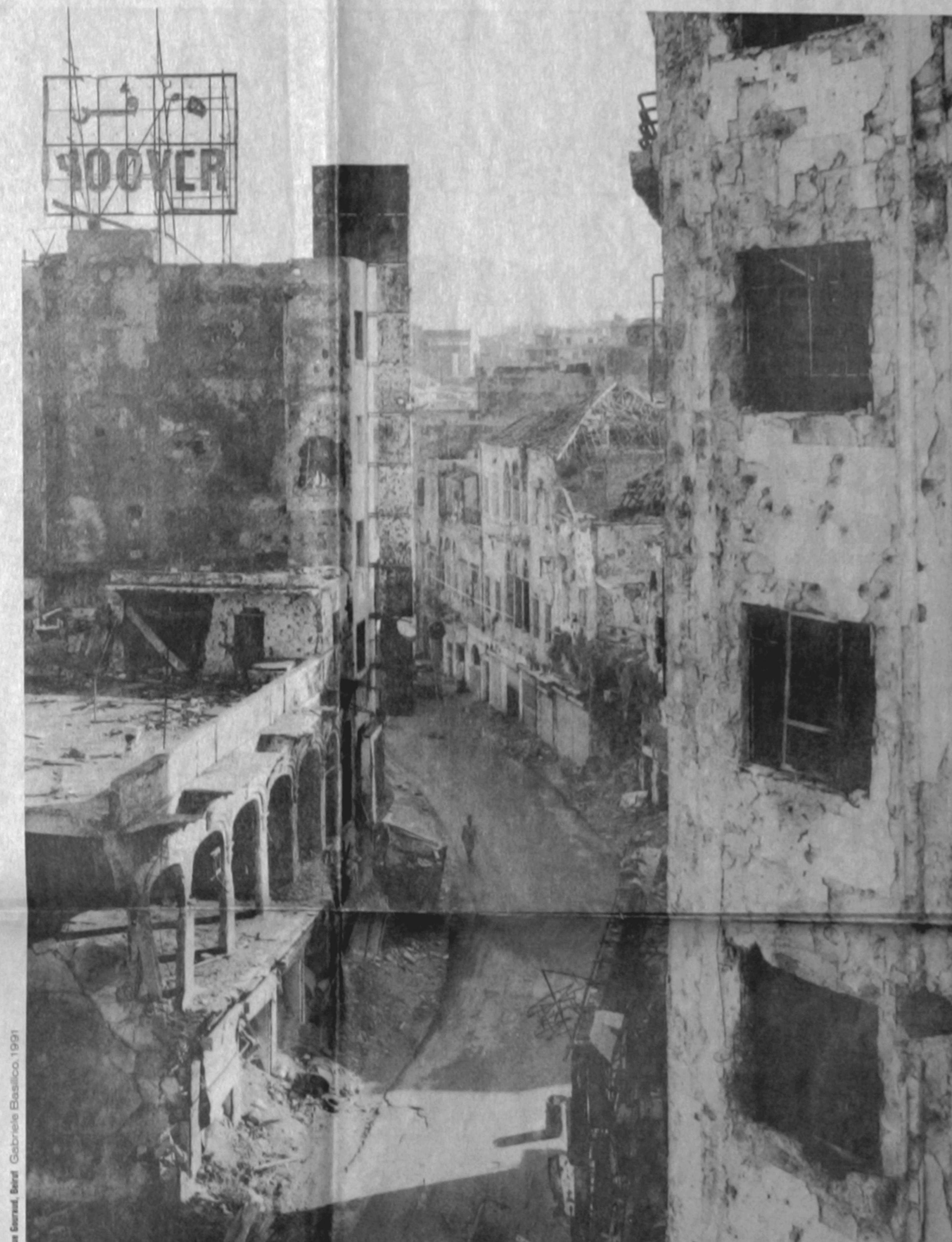
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BASILICO: Beirut

February 21-March 29, 1997 OPENING RECEPTION: March 1, 6-8pm



BEIRUT PHOTOGRAPHS BY **Gabriele Basilico** CURATED BY **Francesco Bonami**
WITH CD-ROM **Rodolphe el-Khoury, Hashim Sarkis AND Allen Sayegh**

This exhibition consists of a photographic documentation of the central section of Beirut in 1991 (soon after the end of the civil war) by Italian photographer, Gabriele Basilico. In conjunction with these photographs about the destruction of Beirut, StoreFront has invited a collaborative research team from Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, to contribute their initiatives and documentation on the reconstruction of the city. A CD-ROM, their work in progress, will be presented at StoreFront. In April 1997, their complete work will be presented through an exhibition, a conference and a publication, at Harvard University.

We would like to thank Mr. Peter Rowe and the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University for their cooperation.

OTHER PROGRAMS

DISCUSSION SERIES

Peggy Deamer
'Theory as a Spatial Concept'
March 11th, Tuesday 6:30pm-8pm

William Menking
'London Calling: from Team X to Gen X'
March 25th, Tuesday 6:30pm-8pm

NEXT EXHIBITION

Raul Bunchoten
April 8-May 24
Opening reception: April 11, 6-8pm

SYMPOSIUM

'Poldergeist: Contemporary Dutch Architecture'
StoreFront will present a symposium this coming Spring at Cooper Union.
April 11-12, Friday & Saturday, 10am-6pm

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MODERATORS:

Christine Boyer, Greg Lynn, and Michael Sorkin

GABRIELE BASILICO: Beirut

"Because Beirut was never just a city. It was an idea—an idea that meant something not only to the Lebanese but to the entire Arab World. While, today just the word 'Beirut' evokes images of hell on earth, for years Beirut represented—maybe dishonestly—something quite different, something almost gentle: the idea of coexistence and the spirit of tolerance, the idea that diverse religious communities—Shiites, Sunnis, Christians, and Druse—could live together, and even thrive, in one city and one country without having to abandon altogether their individual identities."

—Thomas L. Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, 1989

In 1991, one year after the end of a war that lasted fifteen years, the Italian photographer Gabriele Basilico was invited by the writer Dominique Edde to take part in a project aiming at documenting the central part of Beirut, recording with the camera what was left along the infamous and symbolic 'Green Line.' The result, while maintaining an objective and analytical edge, has an ambivalent and disconcerting feeling. It is a document of horrendous past and, at the same time a blue print for an unpredictable future. Basilico's photographs are much more of a question than a statement. Basilico looks at Beirut as if he were looking at any other city transformed, in a more subtle way, by a different disease than war, perhaps by social degradation, perhaps by wild and unconsidered real estate speculation. The Beirut photographs are not a judgment on war but a reflection on what a city is left with once war eventually ends and life resumes its course. The idea of the city remains intact even if its political and social structures have been attacked, and Basilico looks at this system as a doctor would observe a patient who survived a terminal sickness. He notes the damages while celebrating the incredible possibilities and perspectives that any kind of survival can produce. Beirut has survived not just a single war but hundreds of wars, and each dark window in each building represents one of the thousand symptoms that made this city a desperate case, an incurable patient. Yet it survived. Now it is up to us to decide if we are witnessing ruins like the temple of Bacchus at Baalbeck, or brutal scars left by human madness. In fact we have always assumed that the archeological sites we visit are the remains of great cultures and civilizations and not the results of ignorance and barbaric devastation. But even the Parthenon was apparently blown up by the Turks during the seventeenth century, so its present state is not primarily due to the erosion of time and history but to the order of some hasty commander. In the archeological museum of Florence, herds of tourists stand in line to admire a beautiful but badly cracked Greek vase. This fantastic object had to be pasted together not because it was found in pieces under the ground, but because a distracted guard smashed against it at the beginning of the century. It's a matter of creating a sufficient longing that allows us to judge devastation as history and not simply as human folly. Looking at the photos of Beirut, where buildings stand with no less dignity than the Colosseum in Rome's traffic jam, we have to consider how these images will be handled and how they will affect the future history of the city both in terms of architectural development and as a reference point of a time that runs the risk being forgotten. New building methodologies allow for both of the urbanistic structure and the conceptual dimension of any city in the world, in a matter of a few years, erasing devastation but at the same time canceling deep cultural experiences that belong to empty monuments. The sounds of shelling and car-bombs have ceased and Beirut is now deafened by squeaking cranes and the vibrations of jack-hammers. Gabriele Basilico's photographs are not only a pivotal moment in the life of this city, but they are also symbolic visions into the silence behind the blind windows of buildings and palaces.

Because as Thomas L. Friedman would continue: "(...) the real story is often found not in the noise but in the silence—and that is what is so often missed."

—Written by Francesco Bonami/The US Editor of Flash Art Magazine and an independent curator and writer.



Rue Abdel Malek, Beirut. Gabriele Basilico, 1991



Rue El Mourad, Beirut. Gabriele Basilico, 1991



Rue Alamy/Fakky, Beirut. Gabriele Basilico, 1991

Projecting Beirut

Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of the Modern City: Interactive CD-ROM, Rodolphe el-Khoury, Hashim Sarkis and Allen Sayegh.

The interactive CD-ROM documents the urban history of Beirut from the 1830's to the present with an emphasis on comparing the construction of the city as the capital of the modern state of Lebanon during the 1950's and 1960's and the present reconstruction efforts after the 17-year civil war. The CD-ROM is part of an exhibition on the reconstruction of Beirut that will open at Harvard University, Graduate School of Design, on April 11, 1997. The two periods vividly exemplify the ambitions and struggles of both state and civil society to realize their (sometimes synchronized and other times conflicting) visions of what the urban environment should be. In that sense, the CD-ROM will also highlight the changing conceptions of Beirut's image as a capital city of Lebanon and its regional role. These two periods will be represented against a historical timeline of the modern history of the city. They will also be represented through major projects and plans (both built and unbuilt) by Lebanese and international architects.

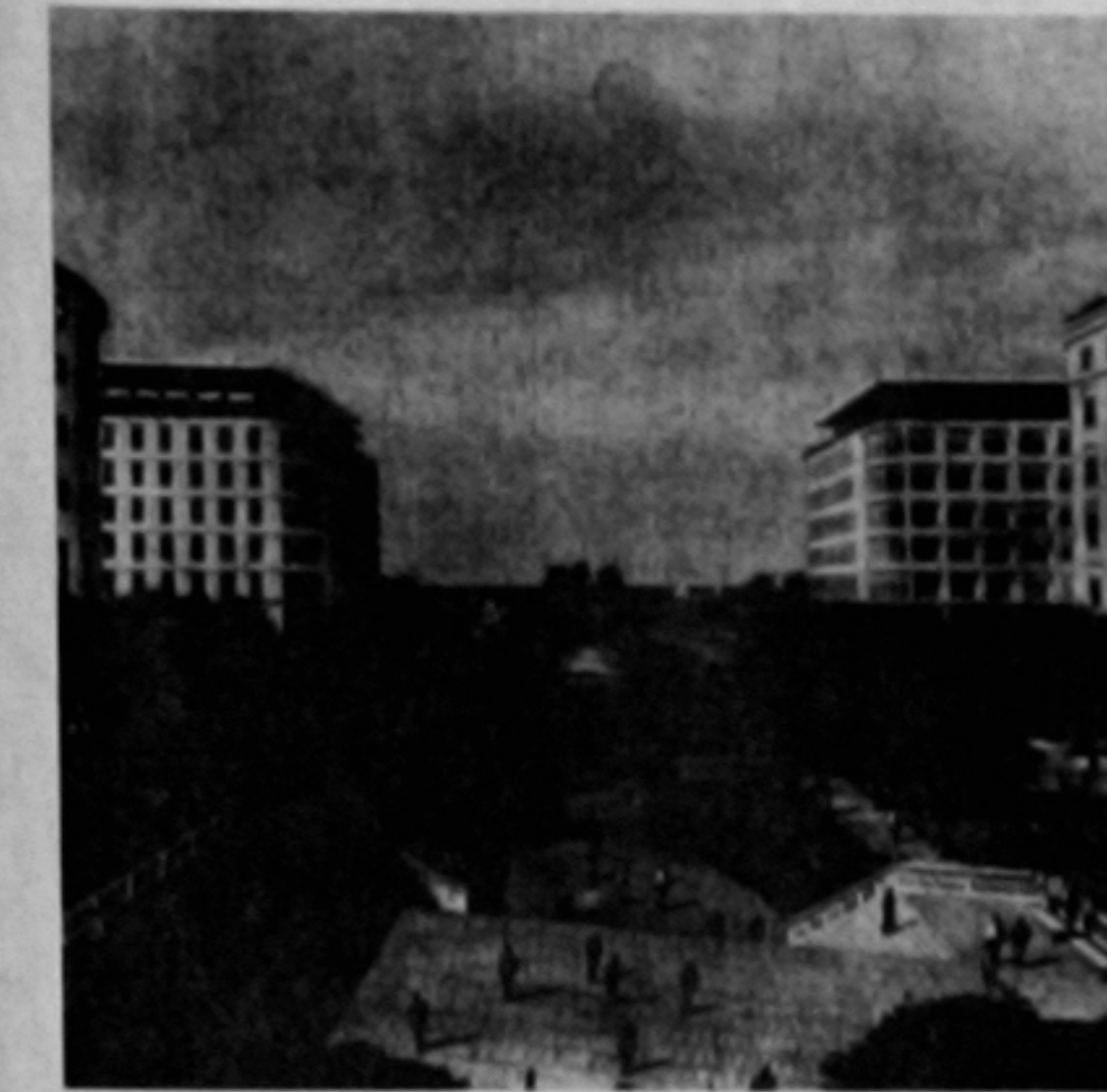
The CD-ROM is presented in the form of four inter-referenced narratives:

1. Timeline overlapping the city's urban history with a political history of the Lebanon and the region. (This will be the portion of the CD-ROM that will be on display at StoreFront for Art and Architecture during the Basilico exhibition.)
2. Comparison between the architecture of the 1950's and 1960's and the present. This comparison will focus on such large scale undertakings as the city's Master plans (most of which remains unrealized), its major infrastructure, such as the airport, the port, and its extensive road network, the plan for the Central Business District, the government complexes, and institutions, as well as samples of the private development projects.
3. Morphological study of the growth of the city from the 1830's to the present highlighting the major periods of growth and the demographic and economical reasons behind it.
4. Biographies and significant projects of architects from the fifties and sixties and from the present. Architects such as André Wogenscky, Oscar Niemeyer, Alfred Roth, Alvar Aalto, and Rafael Moneo, and local architects such as Assem Salam, Pierre Khoury, Wassek Adib, Farid Trad, Antoun Tabet, and Jad Tabet.

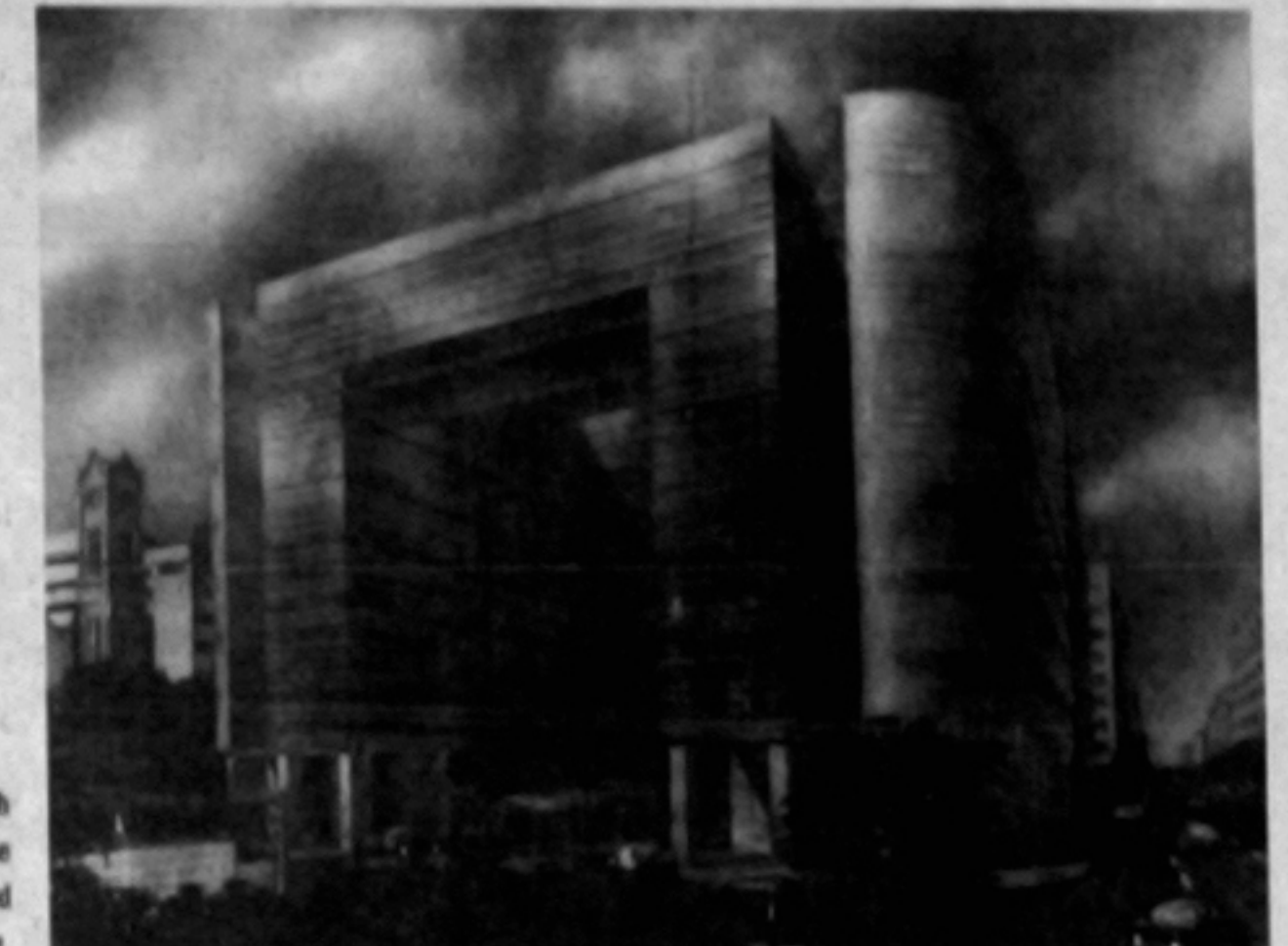
The CD-ROM will be part of an interactive display in an exhibition at Harvard University Graduate School of Design opening on April 11 and will remain displayed until April 24, 1997. The exhibition will then travel to Beirut to open at the Lebanese Order of Engineers and Architects in October 1997. The opening of the exhibition at Harvard will also coincide with a conference that focuses on the rise of the modern period of the city's development. The panels at the conference are the following: the urban history of Beirut reconsidered in light of recent archival research and post-colonialists revaluations; recent archaeological finds and the means of their possible integration in urban reconstruction; the modern architectural heritage of the city as it has emerged out of debates and collaborations between local and international architects; a survey and analysis of the socio-economic context of reconstruction; and presentations and discussions of the recent projects and plans of reconstruction.

The CD-ROM is part of a series of projects undertaken by the Graduate School of Design on the reconstruction of Beirut which will take place over the coming years.

The CD-ROM is the product of work conducted at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, led by Allen Sayegh, instructor in the Department of Architecture, and including Markus Schaefer (MARCH '98), Michelle Tarsney (MARCH '98), Lillian Kuri (MAUD '96), and Ayman Zahreddine (MAUD '97).



The new headquarters for the UN-ESCWA in Beirut, designed by Pierre Khoury, currently under fast-paced construction to attract international organizations to the city center.



View of Place des Martyres with the proposed visual connection to the sea, a revised idea initially proposed during the French mandate.

Discussion Series

Tuesday nights at StoreFront

William Menking, Pratt Institute & Joe Kerr, University of North London

'London Calling: From Team X to Gen X'

March 25th, Tuesday, 6:30pm-8pm

English architecture and design has only intermittently impinged on the international consciousness. Its massive public housing programs aroused interest and respect in the 1950's and 60's. During the big-boom Thatcher years its absolute surrender to the untrammelled forces of free-enterprise global capital aroused a kind of morbid interest. In the 1980's while American corporate practices happily transformed the London skyline, a new generation of British superstar architects (Rogers/Fosters and others) successfully sought markets world wide. Now the style press and critics alike seem intent on promoting London as a design center in fashion, graphic design and art.

However, British architectural culture has at least been partially redeemed by another tradition, an intermittent undercurrent of anti-establishment, anti-architecture, which has constantly challenged the orthodoxies of mainstream practice. Using whatever counter cultural imagery was at hand—the celebration of mass consumerism deployed by The Independent Group, the Americanism of Archigram's techno fantasies, and Rem Koolhaas' 'Manhattanism'—the clubland chic of Ron Arad and Nigel Coates—successive cadres of fringe architects have emerged to redefine the most English of qualities, 'hipness.' Today, a new generation of smart young practices like the women's group 'Muff' compete with each other in the hermetic laboratories of the architecture school unit system (transposed to America by Bernard Tschumi), the pages of specialist press and the limited public forums of competition and the exhibition.

The new prospects offered by a national 'Millennium' lottery have placed seductive commissions within reach, even for architects who previously scorned the compromises that the act of building entail. In some cases, this has merely highlighted the yawning gulf between the internal debates of architectural culture, and the conservatism of public taste—witness Zaha Hadid and the Cardiff Opera House fiasco.

Alternatively, it has offered an opportunity to build for major international practices like Herzon and de Meuron (Tate Gallery) and Daniel Libeskind (V&A Museum), a fast track to recognition and financial success for younger practices.

In a world where architecture is constantly being forced to adopt new strategies for success, from elitist posturing, to sound bites and naked commercial cunning, young British practices are leaders. However, in the image saturated unreality of a post-industrial world, where practices are no longer able to conjure up the simple moral certainties of those 1950's Team X enfants terribles, the Smithsons, we are perhaps witnessing in London the cultural apotheosis of Generation X.

Peggy Deamer

'Theory as a Spatial Concept: Public Space/Private Longing'

March 11th, Tuesday, 6:30pm-8pm

This evening will present the work, in spatial form, of two artists/architects, Ann McDonald and Dean Sakamoto, whose work deals with the occupation of public space with private desires. As theory demonstrates in a masters program in architecture at Yale coordinated by Peggy Deamer, their work demonstrates the integration of research into the content of production as well as the production of theory in physical, not just literary, terms. Dealing with the issue of how to transform the notion of 'public' through an alternative practice of temporary spatial 'possession' these artists operate in a field of speculation introduced by Lefebvre and the Situationist International.